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A LETTER

FROM

Hon. J. R. Giddings,

UPON THE

DUTY OF ANTI-SLAVERY MEN

IN THE

PRESENT CRISIS.

Ravenna, Ohio.

PRINTED BY WILLIAM WADSWORTH.

1844

RAVENNA, 19th Aug., 1844.

HON. J. R. GIDDINGS,

DEAR SIR :

We should be much gratified with a statement of your views upon several topics embraced in your public addresses, which seem to us important to be more widely promulgated and more generally understood at this time.

I. The Constitutional power of the General Government and rights of the States, in relation to slavery. If we rightly apprehend the principles maintained by you, it takes from "the Institution" entirely, the sanction and support of the General Government, and denies that any power is, by the Constitution, conferred upon the Federal Government to act upon the subject in any manner, except perhaps in relation to fugitives. It affirms the right of the free States to be wholly exempt from all participation in the guilt, disgrace or expense of slavery. We understand you also to affirm that in this doctrine Mr. Clay concurs.

II. The question of the annexation of Texas, and the relation of parties to that question. Is this measure, in your judgment, desired by those who urge it at the South, for the purpose of perpetuating slavery in the United States and in Texas? How may the people of the North, most efficiently manifest or express their hostility to that measure and to the object sought to be attained by annexation?

As anti-slavery men, we have observed your course in Congress with approval; and have appreciated your labors and your courage in defence of the rights of the people of the free States. With many whose views coincide with ours, we believe your opinions will be regarded as worthy of high consideration and respect.

With sentiments of respect,

Your Ob't Servants.

G. KEEN,

ISAAC BRAYTON,

SAMUEL FOLJAMBE,

THOMAS EARL,

GEORGE E. CONANT.

LETTER OF MR. GIDDINGS.

GENTLEMEN :

In reply to your first inquiry, I would remark, that at the period of forming our federal Constitution, a spirit of universal liberty pervaded the minds of the people of the free States. "The patriot sages of 1776 had put forth the undying truth" that "*man is born free*," as a *self-evident fact*. In obedience to this declaration, Massachusetts had before the convention assembled, stricken the chains from every slave within her territory. The soil of Vermont had never been contaminated with the footsteps of a slave. The other northern States had commenced a system of gradual emancipation. The delegates carried with them a strong and ardent desire to see the principles of human liberty prevail throughout this republic.—While in convention they spoke of slavery with deep abhorrence, and the most irreconcileable hatred. Not so with the southern States. They regarded slavery as necessary to their prosperity. They refused to enter into the Constitutional compact upon any terms that would subject that institution to the control of the General Government. Up to this period each State had acted in regard to slavery according to the dictates of its own will. Each for itself held supreme, indisputable, and uncontrolled jurisdiction over that institution within its own limits. This entire power was reserved to itself by each State, and no portion of it was delegated to the General Government by the federal Constitution, and to place the subject in such a plain and palpable light that it should never be questioned or disputed, article 10 of the amendments was subsequently adopted; by which it was declared that the powers not delegated by the Constitution were reserved to the several States. It is therefore plain that the General Government has now no more power over the institution of slavery than it had prior to the adoption of the Constitution. The people of the southern States hold that institution as independently of the federal Government, as they did under the old Confederation.

Precisely to the same extent do the people of the free States hold and enjoy the blessings of personal liberty. They delegated to the federal Government no more power to involve them in slavery, than the south did to involve *them* in its abolition. The rights of the States on this subject were

mutual and perfectly reciprocal. Those States who desired to do so could continue the institution of slavery ; and those who desired to be free, and entirely exempt from the expense, the disgrace, and the guilt of it, reserved to themselves the full and indisputable right to remain altogether separate from, and unconnected with, its evils. The sons of the pilgrims regarded slavery as a violation of the will of Heaven, and a flagrant transgression of the law of God. They would no sooner have been prevailed upon to involve themselves in its moral turpitude, than they would in that of piracy or murder. The people of the free States therefore secured to themselves the absolute right of remaining free from the guilt, the disgrace, and the expense of slavery, by withholding from the federal Government all Constitutional power in regard to that institution : while the slave States secured to themselves an equal privilege to enjoy the benefits (as they supposed) resulting from a continuance of slavery. The only exception to this general rule, is the power of Congress to legislate for the return of fugitive slaves. That power being expressly granted by the Constitution.

Clay: —

This doctrine I understand to have been put forth by Mr. Clay in his speech of 1839, where he declares that "*according to the compromises of the Constitution no power whatever was granted to the federal Government in respect to domestic slavery but that which relates to taxation, representation, and the power to restore fugitive slaves.*" "*All other power (says he) in regard to the institution of slavery was retained exclusively by the States.*" The subjects of taxation and representation being established by the Constitution, are placed beyond the control of the federal Government, and I have therefore not regarded them as exceptions to the general rule which I have laid down. It is this absence of all power on the part of the federal Government "*in respect to domestic slavery,*" and retention of "*all other powers by the States exclusively,*" that constitutes the obvious right of the people of the free States to be wholly exempt from the pecuniary expense, the moral guilt, and the public disgrace of an institution which we hold in unmitigated execration. It is this same absence of all power on the part of the federal Government "*in regard to slavery*" that constitutes the obvious right of the people of the slave States to uphold and continue slavery until they shall feel it their duty to abolish it. This doctrine has been often asserted in Congress, and members of that body have been requested to deny it if they regarded it erroneous. It has been published in our Congressional debates, in our newspapers, in public addresses, and in all those modes in which we are accustomed to assert our political doctrines ; but I am not aware that any statesman, jurist, or politician, was ever willing to hazard his reputation by a denial of these obvious rights until the month of August last. The opposite doctrines are of recent origin, not having been avowed by any man until within the present year, although the power of the federal Government has in a silent manner been frequently exerted to support slavery.

I wish it to be distinctly understood that this doctrine which I have advanced, and which had been previously put forth by Mr. Clay, if carried

ant, will separate the people of our free States from the support of slavery, both in the District of Columbia, and in the territory of Florida. For it is most obvious that if the federal Government have "*no power in regard to domestic slavery.*" they have certainly no power to establish it, either in the District of Columbia, or in Florida; and the acts of Congress which now sustain slavery there are unconstitutional and void, and ought to be immediately repealed. I am aware, however, that some of our people say that in the same speech, from which I have quoted, Mr. Clay questioned the power of Congress to interfere with slavery in the District of Columbia. That is true, and he stated his reasons. He regarded slavery there as existing by virtue of *State laws*; as having been brought by the people with them when they came under the federal Government, and he questioned the Constitutional power of Congress to interfere in a relation established by State laws: for we are all aware that neither Mr. Clay, nor Mr. Morris, who replied to his speech at that time, regarded slavery in the District of Columbia as sustained by *law of Congress*. The investigations of that day had not informed us of the fact, and Mr. Clay's denial of "all powers in the federal Government *in regard* to domestic slavery," and his denial of their power to abolish that relation where it existed by virtue of State laws, was perfectly consistent. These I believe now to be the sentiments of the Whig party generally, so far as I am acquainted with the opinions of members of that party. I have endeavored to ascertain the views of leading Whigs, so far as I have been able. I have corresponded with many, and have conversed with many; indeed I have made much inquiry, but to this day I have not been able to find a Whig, either north or south of Mason and Dixon's line, who denies these palpable doctrines of our federal Constitution; indeed, as before remarked, the opposite doctrine is of recent origin, having been first asserted in the month of August last.

Mr. Upshur, then acting as Secretary of State, received from some person (supposed to be Duff Green) then in London, information that an effort was making by the philanthropists of Great Britain to procure the abolition of slavery in Texas.

Information of a discussion in the British House of Lords was also communicated. In that discussion it seems that Lord Brougham had alluded to the fact that the abolition of slavery in Texas would have the effect to hasten its abolition in the United States, as it would destroy the market now furnished by the people of Texas to the slave-breeding States of this Union. This announcement appears to have alarmed Mr. Upshur, who had early directed his attention to Texas as a market for the surplus slave population of the United States.

His alarm also appears to have been increased by the announcement from gentlemen of high consideration in Texas, that that Government would probably "*abolish slavery within the next five years, unless it should be awarded to the United States.*" Such an event would place the line between slavery and liberty upon the southern border of our slave States; and would confine the institution of domestic slavery upon the North Ameri-

can continent to the slaveholding States of this Union. If it be thus restricted, with our free States on the north, and the voice of the civilized world, and the influence of Christendom against it, no doubt remains that its speedy destruction must be inevitable. It was in view of these circumstances that southern statesmen declared that the annexation of Texas is "*a question of the most vital interest to the slaveholding States.*" They say that "**SLAVERY MUST CONTINUE IN TEXAS, OR CEASE IN THE UNITED STATES.**" They were therefore driven to assume the doctrine now contended for by southern democrats, and assented to by the northern portion of that party; that "*the federal Government is bound to uphold and protect the slavery of our Southern States.*" This novel theory was asserted by Mr. Upshur, and re-affirmed by his successor, the Hon. J. C. Calhoun, the present Secretary of State. It was repeated by Senators and Representatives in Congress, by southern primary meetings of the democratic party, and by the southern democratic press, generally. It caused the rejection of Mr. Van Buren, and the nomination of Mr. Polk, and is now the leading policy of the southern wing of the democratic party, and is tacitly assented to by the supporters of Mr. Polk in the free States. Indeed I am not aware that any statesman, and not more than two public papers, of the whole democratic party of the free States, possess the independence publicly to deny their obligation to support the slavery of the south. Here then is the great and principal issue between the two parties. The democrats aver that *we are under Constitutional obligations to support the institution of domestic slavery in our southern States. That its pecuniary burthen, its moral turpitude, and its public odium, shall rest upon the people of our free States as well as on those of the slave States; and that we are bound to furnish a market for the slave-breeding States, where "men, women, and children, may be sold like oxen in the shambles."* This doctrine is denied by the Whig party, and the issue is fully made up; it is now on trial before the grand inquest of the nation, and will soon be determined. Every elector will be compelled by his acts to express his views of political duty. None can be exempt. If I stand opposed to the doctrine now attempted to be enforced upon us by the democratic party, I must vote against that party, and I must sustain those who are opposed to the doctrine. If I feel no interest in the subject, I may refuse to vote; or I may vote for men whose election is not expected.

Under these circumstances I am asked "*what is the duty of Anti-slavery men?*" I answer, that I regard it the duty of every citizen, both of the slave States and of the free States, of those calling themselves "Whigs" and those calling themselves "Democrats," and those calling themselves "liberty men," to oppose this attempted outrage upon the Constitution, upon our constitutional rights, and upon the rights of humanity.

I am however aware that some of our Liberty friends deny that the annexation of Texas will have the effect to perpetuate slavery and the slave trade. I have stated the reason that southern statesmen assign for their efforts in favor of annexation. Those men have been bred in the midst of

slavery. They have spent their lives in observing the influences that affect it. Their fortunes are in a great degree vested in slaves, and their pecuniary interests are involved in the prosperity of that institution. I therefore rely upon their judgment with far greater confidence in this respect than I do upon that of our friends here, whose opportunities of acquiring information must be more limited. Southern democrats urge with great earnestness that the defeat of Mr. Clay and of the Whig party, has become absolutely necessary to the continuance and safety of slavery.— This is the tone of their press, of the resolutions in their popular meetings, and of the addresses of their statesmen and of their public speakers. Yet history will record it as one of the most extraordinary circumstances of the age, that while the democratic party are laboring to defeat Mr. Clay and the Whig party, *in order to perpetuate slavery*, the liberty men of the north are laboring with equal zeal to overthrow Mr. Clay and the Whig party *in order to abolish slavery*. The high toned advocates of eternal slavery in South Carolina, and the warm hearted liberty men of northern Ohio, are now uniting their utmost assiduous and unceasing efforts to decry Mr. Clay, and to defeat the Whigs. To effect this great purpose, they heartily co-operate with each other. This single fact I think, should induce our liberty friends to pause and reflect. When the devoted preacher of the gospel here, finds himself laboring with the infidel advocates of eternal slavery, in his endeavors to defeat the Whig party, I think he should pause and reflect, and take a calm and full survey of his position, before he goes further. I once enquired of a zealous advocate of annexation and slavery, whether he expected that Ohio would cast her vote to perpetuate an institution which we held in such general abhorrence. He answered : “*That will depend upon the liberty party.* If they adhere to their organization (said he) we shall stand a fair chance in Ohio.” I felt deeply humbled at the answer, for I regarded it as but too true. I lately read an article in the “Young Hickory,” the leading advocate of Polk and slavery, in which the editor states his confident reliance upon the liberty party of Ohio and Indiana, to secure the defeat of Mr. Clay in those States.— His calculation has proved a signal failure so far as Indiana is concerned and I hope and trust that the result in Ohio will be equally favorable to the cause of humanity. It is further said that the annexation of Texas is now brought forward “merely as a political question for party purposes?” I answer, if Texas be annexed and slavery perpetuated, and our people of the free States rendered tributary to the slave interests, it will then become a matter of little importance whether it arose from *slave policy or party policy*.

But how stands the fact. In 1837, a proposition was made by the Texan Government to be annexed to this Union. The intention entertained by southern men of effecting that object, has, from that day to this, been the subject of the most unceasing anxiety among a portion of northern men. Such were the evidences manifested in regard to it, that nearly eighteen months since twenty members of the Whig party in Congress,

including the venerable Adams, united in an address to the people of the free States, distinctly calling their attention to the efforts then making to effect this plan of enslaving the people of the free States. During the last autumn it was announced distinctly by the public press, that the President would recommend its annexation in his annual message. But the Executive had resort to the treaty making power, and for a time it was thought the policy would be consummated before the people would have an opportunity of expressing their wishes in regard to it. Thanks to a Whig Senate we are yet free. Still while we attempt to impress upon liberty men the importance of putting forth all our powers to defend ourselves against this treasonable plot, we are told that it is only a *political* movement, got up to manufacture party capital, and that it will die away after the election. Such expressions coming from men who profess a feeling for the slave, or a patriotic sentiment in favor of liberty, are perfectly inexplicable to my understanding.

But probably the most serious objections raised by our liberty men, are to the agent, selected by the Whigs to carry out their measures. They say that Mr. Clay, the Whig candidate for President, is not a suitable man for that office. I answer that the election of President is to be made under the provisions of the Constitution, and for the purpose of carrying those provisions into effect. If Mr. Clay when elected shall faithfully carry out that object, our purpose will be gained, although there should be objections to his moral character. As I have already stated, the great leading object of our opponents is the annexation of Texas and the perpetuity of slavery. Mr. Clay and the Whig party stand pledged before the world to defeat these measures if in their power. No man will say that Mr. Clay will not carry out and redeem his pledge. His worst enemies have never accused him of a want of candor or integrity. No man has any fear that he will turn traitor to those who elect him. Yet some of our liberty men say that he is a duellist, &c. And Dr. Beecher's sermon on duelling is quoted among the religious, to show, what? Why that it is the duty of liberty men to permit Texas to be annexed, and slavery continued in all coming time, rather than to vote for a man who has been bred and educated in a community where duelling is practiced, and who has adopted a code of morals which we regard as wrong, but which he has been compelled to adopt by force of the public sentiment where he lives. There was a time when this argument was urged with propriety. Prior to the nomination of candidates, it was proper to urge upon our friends the duty of selecting a statesman who discards the practice of duelling. We failed to convince them of this policy and the nation has advanced one step forward in the progress of events. Our candidates are selected. The position of each party has been taken. There is no longer an opportunity to change the candidate. To oppose his election now is to oppose the objects and purposes of those who have placed him in nomination. And we are all conscious that the defeat of the Whig party at the coming elections will in all human probability bring about the annexation of Texas and the perpe-

tuity of slavery. Yet a portion of our friends urge that it is our duty to withhold our support from Mr. Clay, although by so doing we shall permit slavery to be perpetuated and the slave trade to be continued. To this reasoning there are in my opinion strong objections. I do not believe it our duty to permit Texas to be annexed, slavery perpetuated, and our federal Constitution violated, until we can correct public sentiment in regard to duelling. I would prefer a man who discards that false code of honor, and I will use my efforts to convince mankind of the enormity of the practice. But as a majority of our people differ from me on this point, and have selected Mr. Clay as their candidate, I am not at liberty to withhold my vote from him and thereby permit thousands of slaves to suffer for no other reason than that public sentiment is wrong in regard to duelling. To the learned author of the discourse to which I allude, I yield all due respect, and will unite with him in all proper efforts to reform our fellow men on that subject; but I object to throwing that question into the whirlpool of political strife. If we cannot arouse mankind to the enormity of duelling by direct appeals to their moral sensibilities, it will be in vain for us to invoke the aid of political proscription. It is true that Mr. Clay has met in single combat the assailants of his honor. This I regard as wrong. It is as much opposed to correct morals as it is for nations to engage in war with each other. Yet we have often engaged in war and thousands of our fellow men have fallen a sacrifice to the false notions of the age in which we live. But our Liberty friends assail Mr. Clay, while they honor those who have advocated the doctrines of war, a thousand times more objectionable, because a thousand times more injurious to the morals and to the happiness of our country. If duelling be wrong, as it most palpably is, then is war much more so. Yet Christians waged long and bloody wars to obtain possession of Palestine. In those Crusades, the devoted Christian would rise from humble prayer and engage in deadly conflict with any man who had cast an imputation upon his honor. Our Pilgrim fathers discarded that bloody code. Not so with our Southern brethren; they are the descendants of the cavaliers, and have continued to cherish the bold chivalry of their progenitors. Mr. Clay has been educated in the doctrines of his fathers, and is yet surrounded with the same influences in which they were bred. He is therefore less censurable than one of us would be for pursuing the same practice.

It is also objected that he was instrumental in extending slavery into Missouri. That he and many northern Representatives voted for the Missouri compromise is true. But if we believe the history of those times, Mr. Clay did it for the patriotic purpose of *preserving the Union*. The question then pending shook the Union throughout its length and breadth, and threatened its immediate overthrow. Mr. Clay was anxious to preserve it, and put forth his efforts for that purpose. But he declared at the same time that such was his dislike to slavery, that "*if he were a citizen of Missouri he would never consent to the adoption of a Constitution that did not provide for its early extinction.*" I am aware that Mr. Clay is

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often represented as having used his influence on that occasion for the purpose of *extending slavery.* History gives a different version of facts, and informs us that his efforts were used to *preserve the Union.*

I regard his intentions as patriotic, and had I been present might probably have concurred in his views. He was then acting under a different state of public sentiment from that which now prevails. But were northern members at this day silently to surrender our rights, I could not expect southern statesmen to maintain them. It is unjust to northern honor to charge Mr. Clay with the responsibility of the Missouri compromise when it was voted for by our own Representatives.

But it is urged that Mr. Clay differs from us in regard to the moral right of holding slaves. On this point so far as we know, Mr. Clay is in sentiment entirely opposed to our views. By holding slaves we must suppose that he approves of slavery : we are authorized to give no other construction to his practice. As I have shown, he agrees with us upon our constitutional rights, which is now the great issue between the political parties, but differs from us upon the moral question of holding slaves. If, therefore, he shall be elected, we shall gain a triumphant victory so far as our political rights are concerned, and so far as political effort can effect our object. But it will leave the moral question of holding slaves untouched. Nor can it be reached by political action. I fully believe with southern men that the extinction of slavery will follow inevitably upon the rejection of Texas and our refusal to lend our support in favor of it. In this I believe anti-slavery men generally concur. Mr. Clay agrees with us as to the rejection of Texas, and our right to be exempt from the support of slavery : while he holds slaves under the Laws of Kentucky. This brings me to the great and principal objection, that "Mr. CLAY IS A SLAVEHOLDER."

The objection is true in point of fact ; I wish it were otherwise. To a certain extent it is a legitimate objection to his moral character. The holding of slaves in a slave State I think is wrong, and detracts from the moral worth of a man who practices it. It is of the same character with the vice of duelling. But there is nothing in the act of holding slaves in Kentucky that disqualifies a man from discharging the duties of President.—There is no more connection between the duties of President and the holding of slaves in Kentucky, than there is between the duties of that office and opposing slavery in Ohio. Mr. Clay may hold his slaves in that State and perform the duties of President just as faithfully, and as honestly, as Mr. Birney could with his views against holding slaves. Nor do I think Mr. Clay would be more likely to encroach upon our rights than Mr. Birney would be to encroach upon those of the slave States. I regard them both as honest men, and so far as slavery is concerned I have no doubt would administer the Government precisely alike. I entertain no fears that Mr. Clay's friendship for slavery would lead him to violate his oath, or the Constitution, no more than I have that Mr. Birney's hatred of slavery would lead him to the commission of moral perjury. It is, however

urged, that as he holds slaves his pecuniary interest would be in favor of that institution. In that respect his situation would be the same as that of a Northern man elected to the same office who holds an interest in a manufacturing establishment, or is interested in agriculture or in commerce.— His interest would be in favor of whatever business or employment his capital is vested. Mr. Birney's interest in Northern agriculture would be as likely to mislead him, as Mr. Clay's interest in slaves would be to draw him from the path of duty. But in either case the interest would be too remote for any man to suppose it would induce them to violate their oath of office. But it is urged that holding slaves is wrong and immoral, and that no slaveholder is entitled to our confidence. And now I suppose I have reached the great and real objection which exists in the minds of anti-slavery men against Mr. Clay.

They regard the holding of slaves as a crime, and that they say, "if we vote for a slaveholder, we voluntarily participate in his crimes." Yet they will apply such doctrine to no other transaction of life. If they wish to employ a lawyer, they will look for the man most likely to execute the trust reposed in him to their satisfaction. If he be an infidel or an immoral man, yet likely to transact their business more satisfactorily than others, they will employ him without feeling that they participate in his vices. If they wish to purchase a farm they will employ the agent whom they think best qualified to effect that object without particular reference to his morals. In our church associations we admit none who disagree with us on doctrines of christian faith. But in our civil relations we are compelled to associate with infidels and those who differ from us on moral, and religious subjects. The infidel has the same rights and is equally interested in preserving our civil institutions as the pious christian. Under our federal compact the slaveholder possess the same rights that the anti-Slavery man holds and if he be devoted to the support of the constitution he is equally entitled to hold office. Still our liberty friends urge that their *consciences* will not permit them to vote for a slaveholder, and that in rejecting Mr. Clay they only obey the dictates of their own feelings.

The moral sense, or the power to discriminate between right and wrong, was bestowed upon us for high and useful purposes. When the judgment is fully informed, and the mind is uninfluenced by feeling or interest, the conscience may be regarded as an almost unerring guide. But acting without the proper information, or under this influence of feeling or of interest, it is a dangerous conductor. It led Saul to persecute the Saints; the Catholics to burn Protestants; and the Puritan fathers to hang those whom they called witches. I will relate some recent circumstances which illustrate the danger of following an impulse.

During the campaign of last autumn, I had occasion to address the people in a distant Congressional District of this State. The Whig candidate was an early supporter of the rights of the North, and of mankind. He was among the most distinguished philanthropists of that district. Every Liberty man admitted that he would vote in regard to slavery, if elected,

precisely as they wished. The opposite party had put in nomination a man who was understood to be opposed to all those measures which would separate us from the support of slavery. The Liberty party held the balance of power. They were told that it was quite likely that the repeal of the gag-rule, and of the law that sustains slavery and the slave trade in the District of Columbia might depend upon a single vote; if so the continuance of them would depend upon the vote of the Liberty men of that district.—They thought the Whig candidate, if elected, would vote for Mr. Clay to the office of President, and they said their consciences would not permit them to vote for any man who would sustain a slaveholder: The whig candidate was defeated: His opponent was elected, and the gag rule was sustained by a majority of *one vote only*. It was the opinion of many members that if the gag-rule were repealed there would be no difficulty in repealing the law that sustains slavery and the slave trade in the District of Columbia. Such was my own opinion. If we were correct in this opinion, I ask if those who refused to sustain a man whose efforts would have repealed the law that sustains the slave trade in that district are not now involved in the guilt of that execrable commerce? It was in their power to repeal the law that sustains it. They refused to do so, and now plead the dictates of their consciences to justify their refusal. Does not the blood of slaves rest upon them? When the slave mother, bereft of her children by the inhuman dealer in mankind, shall in the inutterable grief of her soul, cast her eyes towards those men and ask, "*Why did you not relieve me from this heartrending separation?*" Will she be satisfied if they tell her, "*Our consciences would not permit us to sustain a man that would vote for Mr. Clay?*" It is a principle as old as the English common law, "that he who looks on and sees a crime committed when it is in his power to prevent it, becomes accessory to the guilty;" and will our theologians tell us that a different rule prevails in morals? I am aware that some men so preach; but for myself I dare not follow their teaching. It is said by them that it is wrong to vote for a slaveholder; or for one who will support a slaveholder. I answer that it is their duty to do the greatest good in their power, and to prevent all evil which it is in their power to prevent, and if to effect that object it becomes necessary to vote for a slaveholder, it will be right, and a duty for them to do so. I once asked a pious divine, if he would vote for Mr. Clay were he conscious that by so doing he would abolish slavery? He replied that he *would not*. I pronounce no judgment upon his theology. To his own master he stands or falls. I may say however, that I dare not follow his precepts. The men belonging to the Liberty party at the last election, defeated at least six candidates for Congress, who, if elected, would have voted to repeal the gag-rule, and the slave laws of the District of Columbia. Had they been elected—as they might have been—I fully believe those laws would have been repealed. I therefore think those men responsible for their continuance.

The success of the Democratic party at the ensuing election will be regarded as the voice of the people in favor of extending and perpetuating

slavery. That object may be defeated by the aid of our Liberty friends. This is clearly obvious to every man; yet some members of that party say, that the annexation of Texas and consequent extension of slavery is but a circumstance in the life of that institution, and is no good reason why they should abandon their political organization to oppose it. But if Texas is annexed to this Union, and slavery extended over that territory under the protection of our laws, and the precedent established that we are bound to sustain it with our treasure and our blood, the existence of the Liberty party will then be of no use, so far as slavery is concerned. Ourselves and our children, and our children's children, will pass away before any efforts from the free States can aid the slave in obtaining his rights. The institution will then bid defiance to all our labors of philanthropy;—we may then fold our arms and sit down in gloomy silence; instead of striking the chains from the limbs of the slave, we shall have fastened them upon our own. The Liberty party may then afford support to some few editors and travelling lecturers, but they will lend no ray of hope to the down-trodden slave. He will then be placed beyond the reach of their efforts. The sceptre of political power will again be swayed by the advocates of eternal slavery, whose ears are impenetrable to the cries of humanity.

But some liberty men insist that "Mr. Clay is not fully committed against the annexation of Texas." They admit that to be the great question now pending between the two parties; that the Democratic party is rallying in favor of annexation, and the Whigs against it; that Mr. Polk was nominated upon the principle that he was in favor of it. They know that opposition to the annexation of Texas is the rallying cry of the Whig party; that they are concentrating their energies and efforts upon that point; and that they stand pledged before the world to prevent annexation if possible. Mr. Clay is their candidate, with a full knowledge of all these facts. He must therefore turn traitor to those who elect him, or he must use his influence against the annexation of Texas. I think no man will regard him as a capable of such violation of faith. By consenting to run as the candidate of those who are openly and avowedly opposed to that policy, he stands strongly committed to carry out their views, even had he said nothing upon the subject. But by reference to his letter on that question, we find him pointing to the odium which "an impartial and enlightened world" will cast upon us, if we obtain further territory, "for the purpose of propagating slavery from the United States;" and deprecating the introduction into our Government "of a new element of discord and distinction;" that is the support of Slavery. He then goes on to say that "*Texas ought not to be admitted into the Union as an integral part thereof in decided opposition to the wishes of a considerable and respectable portion of the confederacy.*" This expression of his sentiments as explained by him in his letter to the editor of the *Tuscaloosa Monitor*, has reference to the States, comprising the Union; and he illustrates his views still further by saying that he regards our Union "*as a great political co-partnership.*"

Thus making the Annexation of Texas depend upon the consent of *all the States*! For every man is aware that no new member can be admitted into a co-partnership, without the consent of *all the old members*. It is equally obvious that no portion of these States can annex the others to Texas, and while a single State refuses to enter into the new co-partnership with Texas, the annexation by the others, would itself be a dissolution of the Union which Mr. Clay declares it has been the leading object of his life to prevent. This expression of Mr. Clays opinions I regard as satisfactory. When Ohio, Vermont, Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts, shall each rescind their resolutions against the annexation, and consent to unite their political destinies with slaveholding Texas I shall neither ask nor expect Mr. Clay to oppose that measure. But after the Executive and many democratic Statesmen had asserted the Constitutional obligation of the federal government to sustain Slavery *in the States*, Mr. Clay declared "*the preservation exclusively by the several States, of their own local and peculiar institutions*" to be the whig doctrines. This was stated at the close of his speech at Raleigh in April last. It is the identical doctrine for which Anti-slavery men contend. They would *exclude* the federal government and the free States from all participation in the preservation of an institution which we hold in such unqualified detestation. This is *truly Whig* doctrine, for it is the doctrine of the constitution which gives us no power to preserve slavery. It is the doctrine of Mr. Clay, as put forth in his speech of 1839, in which he denies to the federal government all powers in regard to slavery, "*except as to taxation representation and the return of fugitive Slaves.*"

This doctrine is directly opposed to that which is now asserted by the Democratic party. They contend that the federal government and the people of the free States are bound to sustain the slavery of the Southern States.

We contend for "the total separation of the federal government from all unconstitutional support of slavery." I have often stated this as the ulterior design of our liberty men, so far as *political effort* was concerned. If I have mistaken their views, I hope the error will be corrected, and that the public may be definitely informed of the extent of their political objects. I am aware that they design to call up public attention to the wrong, to the *crime* of slavery; and to array the moral feelings of mankind against it. That is right and proper, and I have ever felt it my duty, whether in public or in private life, to lend my moral influence against slavery every where. My political efforts are controled by our constitutional compact. As the federal government possesses no power over it, we can exert no political power against it. Our political efforts theretore in regard to Slavery may extend to the repeal of all acts of Congress in favor of that institution, and to a total seperation of the federal Government and the people of the free States from its support. To this point we are limited. We can go no further by our *political action*. To this extent Mr. Clay is with us. So far as our political power extends he argues with us; and

shall we oppose his election, and prefer the perpetuity of slavery, for the reason that he differs from us upon the moral question which lies beyond all political power? When I first entered Congress, the objects and ulterior designs of our anti-slavery men were not very accurately defined.

They were then understood to consist in a vague and general hostility to slavery. I early saw, or thought I saw, the propriety of calling the attention of all parties to the violations of the constitution in favor of the interests of slavery, then so frequently practiced. I was exceedingly desirous to show to our people of the free States the manner in which they were compelled to support Slavery in violation of their constitutional rights. I wished to see the constitutional line of demarcation that separates us from the support of slavery, clearly defined. To effect these objects, I made speeches; I wrote addresses to my constituents, and I published essays. I did this with the most perfect conviction that when fully informed of the encroachments upon their rights, the people would correct the abuses. Up to this day my most sanguine expectations have been more than realized. The whig party are now arrayed in favor of their doctrines and measures, with a fair and almost certain prospect of success, unless we shall be deserted by those professing to be the peculiar friends of the Slave.

But while our Whigs have been gradually coming up to the support of our constitutional rights, our liberty friends have organized into a separate political party, and arrayed themselves against us. The more zealously the Whigs have engaged in opposing these encroachments upon the constitution, the more vehemently they have been assailed by the liberty party, while a corresponding silence and forbearance has been manifested by them towards the party, claiming the extension and perpetuity of slavery at the expense of our interests, our honor, and our federal constitution. Indeed the most distinguished advocate of eternal slavery now living does not appear to be so frequently the subject of personal attack by our liberty friends, as the time honored Adams, the steadfast and indomitable supporter of human rights. Both the justice and the policy of this course are incomprehensible to me. I can discover no benefit that is to result from it, either to the slave or the freeman. If our liberty friends have any well defined political object in view, beyond those for which the Whigs are now contending, I hope they will point it out, and exhibit it distinctly to the country. If they are unable to do that, I hope they will no longer keep up a separation that to me appears to endanger almost every political right which we hold dear, and which is likely to extinguish the last ray of hope to the suffering slave.

If the object of our Liberty friends be to organize and continue a distinct political party, it will of course be perfectly consistent for them to separate from those who are striving to prevent the annexation of Texas, and the perpetuity of slavery. But this I feel assured is not the purpose of the great mass of those who have heretofore voted for Mr. Birney.—They are among the warmest friends of humanity, and I am confident will

put forth their efforts in opposition to a policy which must prove fatal to the liberties of ourselves, as well as to the hopes of the slaves. All admit it to be their duty to exert their political influence to support the constitution and rights of mankind. It is equally clear that it is the duty of those who desire to effect that object, to unite their energies; for, without union, no possible good can result from our labors. But the difficulty is for us to unite our energies in such a manner as to prevent the consummation of those designs. Party attachments will lead many of our Democratic friends to vote for "Polk and eternal slavery," rather than see their party defeated. Yet many of that party will not vote, and others will vote for Mr. Clay. So also with our Liberty friends; I have no doubt that party attachments may influence some of them to adhere to their party organization, while I am confident that many of that party will permit no such partisan bias to come in conflict with their duty. Yet some of our Liberty men say that Mr. Birney and their party are opposed to the annexation of Texas and the perpetuity of slavery, and if they vote for him they will discharge their duty as well as by voting for Mr. Clay. I reply, that it is our duty to *unite*. They say, then let us unite on Mr. Birney! I reply, that when the great majority who seek a common object shall unite upon the means of effecting it, the minority are in duty bound to unite with them. Of the great number of our people opposed to the annexation of Texas and the perpetuity of slavery, probably ninety-five out of every hundred have united on Mr. Clay as the agent to carry out their opposition to these measures. The other five out of each hundred are opposed to him, and believe that Mr. Birney would do better than Mr. Clay. Now the ninety-five are equally intelligent as the five, and will any man urge that it is the duty of the ninety-five to surrender their judgements and preferences to the five; or that it is not the obvious duty of the five to surrender their opinions, and unite with their friends? I think there can be but one answer to the question, I was myself no advocate for the nomination of Mr. Clay.

I have at no time hesitated to declare my inability to support any man for President who should deny the constitutional doctrines I have so long labored to bring into exercise. Solemnly sworn to support the federal Constitution, I could not support any man who denies its most obvious doctrines. Mr. Clay maintains those doctrines. The opposite party are seeking to subvert them. As a friend to the slave, as a supporter of our own liberties, as an American citizen, devoted to our Constitution, I feel constrained by every obligation resting upon me, both moral and political, to unite my efforts with those who are opposing the annexation of Texas, the extension and perpetuity of slavery, and the subversion of our federal Constitution.

With great respect,
Your Ob't Servant.
J. R. GIDDINGS.

Messrs. G. KEEN, ISAAC BRAYTON,
SAMUEL FOLJAMBE, THOMAS EARL,
GEORGE E. CONANT.

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